

April 9, 2009

Today, April 9, 2009, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) commended the announcement by President Obama, Secretary Gates, and Secretary Shinseki that the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs have taken the first step in creating a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record. Currently, there is no comprehensive system in place that allows for a streamlined transition of health care records between DOD and the VA. Both Departments will work together to define and build a system that will ultimately contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service throughout their military career, and after they leave the military.

"America's Veterans have earned the full support of their nation," said Congressman Sestak. "There is a sacred trust between a nation and its warriors, and the measures announced today are a major step toward providing them the care they have earned. Never again should a service member fall through the cracks between the DOD and VA as they transition out of active duty, and never again should we lose sight of or turn our backs on anyone who has served this nation honorably. I am especially please that this plan enacts some of the very reforms that I have been fighting for in Congress."

Access to electronic records is essential to modern health care delivery and the paperless administration of benefits. It provides a framework to ensure that all health care providers have all the information they need to deliver high-quality health care while reducing medical errors. The creation of this Joint Virtual Lifetime Record by the two organizations would take the next leap to delivering seamless, high-quality care, and serve as a model for the nation.

Those who serve and have served our country in uniform are America's greatest strategic asset. Our commitment to the sacred trust we have with those who serve is clear in both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs budgets and in the strong leadership of Secretaries Gates and Shinseki.

The Congressman believes that the quality of care that our Veterans receive should never be hindered by budget delays. What that means is a timely and predictable flow of funding from year to year, but more importantly, that means better care for our veterans.

The Department of Defense Budget will:

Fully protect and properly fund the growth in military end strength in the base budget. This means completing the growth in the Army and Marines while halting reductions in the Air Force and the Navy.

Continue the steady growth in medical research and development by requesting \$400 million more than last year.

Recognize the critical and permanent nature of wounded, ill and injured, traumatic brain injury, and psychological health programs. This means institutionalizing and properly funding these efforts in the base budget and increasing overall spending by \$300 million. The department will spend over \$47 billion on healthcare in FY10.

Increase funding by \$200 million for improvements in child care, spousal support, lodging, and education.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Budget will:

Increase funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs by \$25 billion above baseline over the next five years.

Dramatically increase funding for veterans health care.

Expand eligibility for veterans' health care to over 500,000 veterans who were previously denied care by 2013.

Enhance outreach and services related to mental health care and cognitive injuries, including post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, with a focus on access for veterans in rural areas.

Invest in better technology to deliver services and benefits to veterans with the quality and efficiency they deserve.

Provide greater benefits to veterans who are medically retired from service.

Combat homelessness by safeguarding vulnerable veterans.

Facilitate timely implementation of the comprehensive education benefits that veterans earn through their dedicated military service.

Congressman Sestak has no higher priority than supporting this Nation's Veterans. Today, Congressman Sestak and Pennsylvania Institute of Technology President John Strayer announced a program to provide full scholarships to P.I.T. for Veterans who have served in the military since September 11, 2001, and are residents of the 7th Congressional District. The Veterans Scholarship program was developed in response to the critical role education plays in the reintegration and future success of returning Veterans. The new initiative provides full scholarships to earn an associate's degree for as many qualified Veterans as can be accommodated by select programs at P.I.T.

To aid in his effort to support Veterans here in the 7th District and in Congress, Congressman Sestak is holding the Third Annual Veterans Summit in May at Ridley High School. Last year's Veterans Summit drew over 300 veterans and their families. The 7th Congressional District has 54,000 Veterans—from the World War II generation to those recently returning from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq—and the Congressman's District Office has handled over 1,200 Veterans cases.

The Third Annual Veterans Summit will be held Monday, May 11, 2009, from 6-9pm at Ridley High School, in Folsom. To sign up for the Summit, please visit [http://www.sestak.house.gov/upcoming\\_events.shtml](http://www.sestak.house.gov/upcoming_events.shtml)

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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